













Wednesday, July 2, 2008

Retirement, contract negotiations led council agenda before break

County Council frustrated by its limited role it plays in union talks County News by Janel Davis | Staff Write E-mail this article \ Print this article

of Silver Spring said.

Before taking this week off, the County Council agreed last week to implement three outstanding retirement issues negotiated by County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) with the county's employee unions.

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The council also said it intends to examine the role it plays in union negotiations; the council now may only accept, reject or modify agreements reached by the executive. That forces the council to make decisions "on the fly," Councilwoman Valerie Ervin (D-Dist. 5)

Councilman Marc Elrich (D-At large) of Takoma Park agreed. "We need to change this dynamic. This is not the way we should be doing things here," he said.

On June 24, the council approved making firefighters with certain types of cancer to be automatically eligible for some service-connected disability retirement benefits. The provision almost failed when some council members questioned whether the county should have to pay for illnesses that are not work-related.

The council also approved a provision that requires the county to pay both employee and employer retirement while an employees is on military duty and increases both contributions for some union members' retirement.

Also approved are provisions allowing police officers to retire after 25 years, eliminating mandatory retirement and restarting a program that allows officers who are at least 46 to retire but continue to work.

"I think these items were [negotiated] in good faith," said Councilwoman Duchy Trachtenberg (D-At large) of North Bethesda, who leads the committee that considered the proposals.

Trachtenberg also called for changing the council's part in union negotiations.

"I think it is time to clean up the process," she said.

The council last month deferred a decision on a proposal to increase the number of union representatives on the investment board that oversees \$3 billion in employee retirement benefits.

Affordable housing

A county task force has outlined six ways to increase the county's supply of affordable units, including allowing accessory apartments without requiring a special permit, reducing parking requirements for housing developments and establishing a central authority for affordable housing.

Leggett, who has made affordable housing a priority, has already proposed creating a revolving equity fund to buy land or existing developments for affordable units — a proposal backed by the task force.

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The challenge now is to ensure that the task force's recommendations are acted upon and not forgotten as similar reports in the past, Councilwoman Nancy M. Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park warned after a briefing last week.

A meeting to discuss the report is set for July 14.

Street parking

Council President Michael J. Knapp (D-Dist. 2) of Germantown introduced a bill to ban commercial vehicles from parking on public streets. The proposal follows complaints from residents who complain that the trucks, vans and other vehicles cause safety concerns.

Under the proposal, the vehicles could not park on either side of a street that abuts a block containing private residences, apartments, churches, schools, hospitals and playgrounds.

Knapp is exploring other areas where the vehicles can park, including possibly using underused county lots. Drivers could be charged a fee to park, he said.

A public hearing is set for July 22.

Ambulance fee

The council holds a public hearing on a proposed ambulance fee at 7:30 p.m. July 8 in the Council Office Building at 100 Maryland Ave. in Rockville. Call 240-777-7900.

